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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 006137

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NSC STAFF FOR POUNDS

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SUBJECT: PROSPECTS FOR INTERNATIONAL MONITORING OF EGYPT'S ELECTIONS

Classified by CDA Stuart Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

1. (C) Since President Bush's May 7 call for international monitoring of Egypt's presidential elections, the GOE has expressed little enthusiasm for the idea, but has also avoided rejecting it. The GOE continues to argue that international monitoring is opposed by many in the Egyptian public as an affront to Egyptian sovereignty. With the campaign due to begin on August 17, the presidential election scheduled for September 7, and no international monitors lined up, time appears to be running out for the presidential election. The GOE may be hoping to stave off the issue through delay as opposed to confrontation. Nevertheless, the Embassy believes that now is the time to deliver our strongest points on the need for a GOE decision on this issue. Even if international monitors of the presidential elections constitute a merely symbolic presence, they will be an important symbol. There is still plenty of time to organize a more comprehensive international monitoring effort for the parliamentary elections, which will likely occur in November, and which most observers agree actually hold the key to Egypt's democratic progress. End summary.

The GOE's argument

2. (C) Prime Minister Nazif has been the most vocal messenger of the GOE's reluctance to invite international monitors. Beginning with his comments to NBC and PBS in May while on his official visit to Washington, and as recently as late July in remarks to CNN, Nazif has taken the line that the GOE sees no need for international observers. The goal, Nazif has repeatedly noted, is for the upcoming elections to be seen as free and fair, and Egypt's unique system of judicial supervision of the polls is well qualified to provide this oversight. Similarly, in comments to the Deputy Secretary in mid-July (septel), presidential son and head of

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the NDP Policy Committee Gamal Mubarak noted that the GOE has not yet made a decision about this contentious issue, and continues to believe that elections are a domestic affair that have no need for international supervision. (Note: Nazif and other GOE commentators have tended to downplay the considerable controversy and uncertainty that exists about the mechanics, thoroughness, and general feasibility of judicial supervision of the upcoming elections. In addition, they have chosen to ignore the fact that judicial supervision of the polls alone, even if successful, will provide no monitoring of the campaigns leading to the elections. End note.) Significantly, however, the GOE has not issued a categorical refusal to accept international monitors. Rather, they have voiced their general opposition, and noted that the issue is still under consideration. This delaying tactic has allowed them so far to avoid a direct confrontation over the issue.

3. (C) In contrast to the prevailing GOE reluctance, in a July 26 conversation with poloff, the Vice President of Egypt's newly formed Presidential Elections Commission noted his intention to urge the Commission, at its formal meeting on July 27, to formally invite international monitors to observe the September 7 election. To date, however, the Commission has issued no such invitation.

4. (C) The issue of international monitoring has occasioned considerable public debate. Many conservative editorialists--including some who are widely believed to be in the pay of the GOE--have denounced international monitoring as "foreign interference." Certain leaders of opposition political parties and groups, including the Wafd and the Muslim Brotherhood, have taken a similar line, though independent analysts wonder if their stance is based, at least in part, on a desire to curry favor with the GOE. Other opposition parties, such as al-Ghad and Tagammu, have argued that international monitors should be welcomed if the GOE wishes to convince the world of its commitment to

political reform. During a recent conference at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, NDP reformist Dr. Ossama al-Ghazaly Harb summarized the case for international monitoring thusly: international monitoring cannot be considered foreign interference in national sovereignty, if the GOE truly wants to conduct democratic elections. Harb noted that international monitoring is now the "worldwide norm," and discounted the "foreign interference" argument as "nonsense."

At odds with its actions

15. (C) Somewhat surprisingly, given the GOE's opposition to any foreign monitoring of Egypt's elections, the GOE has participated recently in poll monitoring in a number of countries, including the Palestinian Authority, Zimbabwe, and Uganda. Most recently, the foreign minister of the aspirant nation of Somaliland noted that in her bilateral meetings in Cairo, the GOE had agreed to assist Somaliland with monitoring of its upcoming elections. The GOE has not sought to publicize its own participation in international monitoring efforts in other countries.

Diplomatic community willing, but but only if the GOE asks

16. (C) Embassy Cairo officers have continued to explore the issue of international monitors and observers with various members of the diplomatic community in Cairo. The U.N., the E.U., and various European embassies all agree on the desirability of international monitoring, but they all also note that any effort would be predicated on the GOE inviting international monitors to play a role. Our diplomatic contacts agree that every day the GOE delays making a decision on international monitors diminishes the likelihood that a meaningful international monitoring effort can take place. Observers also agree, however, that regardless of whether or not international observers play a meaningful role in the monitoring the upcoming elections, media scrutiny, domestic monitoring, and judicial supervision (if it comes to pass) will ensure that the 2005 elections will be the most scrutinized polls in modern Egyptian history.

Comment

17. (C) We believe that we should continue to push the GOE to accept international monitoring, but that we must also be prepared to assist international monitors to move quickly if/when the GOE invites them. The National Democratic Institute (NDI), the International Republican Institutes (IRI), and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) are operational in Cairo, with USAID support, and might be mobilized quickly to support international monitoring efforts if the GOE were to give the green light. Ideally, the GOE would act in the next few days, prior to the start of the presidential campaign, to invite international monitors to play a role. Barring this, even a last minute positive decision by the GOE to invite monitors for the presidential election could be seized by the diplomatic community here to play a more public role in analyzing the elections process and results. Finally, we continue to believe that the parliamentary elections, which will likely be scheduled for November, remain the real prize for 2005, since it will be the new Parliament which will be able to test the GOE's stated commitment to democratic reform and to set the stage for any future change in executive power. End comment.

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